

PUBLIC OPINION IN SOVIET POLITICAL SYSTEM

A Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the award of the Degree of
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

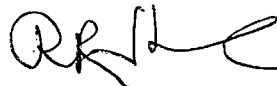
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1988

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the M.Phil. dissertation entitled " PUBLIC OPINION IN SOVIET POLITICAL SYSTEM" submitted by Chitra Chaudhary of the Centre for Soviet and East European Studies is her original work carried out under my guidance and supervision and has not been submitted for the award of any other degree of this university or of any other university.



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TO MY PARENTS

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PREFACE

PREFACE

A proper study of the role of public opinion in the Soviet political system is one of the crucial questions for understanding the nature and functioning of the Soviet policy. To what extent people's opinion is taken into consideration, to what extent can people speak out and what impact does public opinion have upon the decision-makers - these are some of the issues which call for serious investigation.

To Lenin, public opinion constituted an important means of ensuring continued mass support for the revolution. The emphasis on direct democracy and recall in his speeches and writings show his great concern for public opinion. This concern for public opinion was, however, sidetracked during the Stalin period, though lip-service continued to be paid to the principle of free expression of public opinion in important party and state pronouncements.

The study traces the course of re-emergence of the old emphasis on public opinion in the early 60s in the wake of de-Stalinisation. The introduction of the new concept of the "state of the whole people" by Khrushchev and its

juridical confirmation in the 1977 Constitution under Brezhnev proved a shot in the arm for development of the concept of public opinion and recognition of its significant role in the Soviet political system. The study also focusses on a critical evaluation of the functioning of the various institutions of public opinion like recall and referendum, work with letters, as also of the various instruments to ascertain public opinion like public opinion polls and surveys, etc.,.

The work is based on such primary sources as the work of Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev, proceedings and reports of the Party Congresses, various Constitutions of the USSR and the laws relating to public opinion. It is also made use of studies by Soviet and Western authors and the material published on the subject in several Soviet and Western journals, magazines and newspapers.

I am indebted to my supervisor Prof. Devendra Kaushik for his invaluable guidance. I am also thankful to the Librarian and staff of the Jawaharlal Nehru University Library for their help and cooperation in consulting the material for completion of this work. I remain grateful

to my friend and colleague Miss. Madhu Bala for helping me in various ways and cheering me up in course of my work on the dissertation.

NEW DELHI
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CHAPTER - I

MEANING AND CONTENT OF PUBLIC OPINION - A HISTORICAL
SURVEY OF PUBLIC OPINION IN SOVIET POLITICAL SYSTEM
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MEANING AND CONTENT OF PUBLIC OPINION - A HISTORICAL SURVEY OF PUBLIC OPINION IN SOVIET POLITICAL SYSTEM BEFORE THE RISE OF STALIN:-

Today public opinion is an object of widespread interest. Never in human history so much interest has been shown in public opinion. This is indicated particularly by the great interest taken by universities and other academic research institutions in promoting studies in public opinion. Numerous research organizations at different levels have sprung up in recent decades for the purpose of analysing the different aspects of public opinion and monitoring it. In as much as it has been an object of study by the economists, educationists, journalists, political scientists, historians, psychologists, and sociologists, it has grown into an important field of knowledge vitally affecting the lives of the people.

The term "public opinion" evokes certain questions in the mind of researcher, viz, what is it, how is it formed ?, etc. We may call "public" as a large collection of individuals (either assembled at one point or scattered over a wider area) who do not know each other personally but who react to an issue with the expectation that certain categories of other individuals will display similar attitude on the same issue. "Opinion" may be defined as an expression of attitude in words.

In short, collection of individual opinions on a problem is referred to as "public opinion".

The nature of public opinion as a social and political process is still almost an unexplored field of research. There are differences among scholars about its definition. Thus Lord Bryce writes:

" The term-public opinion is commonly used to denote the aggregate of the views men hold regarding matters that affect or interest the Community." ¹

But Charles Colly, on the other hand, asserts,

" public opinion is no mere aggregate of separate individual judgements, but an organization, a cooperative product of communication and reciprocal influence." ²

In spite of differences in definition, students of public opinion generally agree that it is a collection of individual opinions on an issue of public interest. It is a state of mass consciousness. In simple words, public opinion is an attitude of society towards various social issues.

1. Lord Bryce, Modern Democracies (London, 1923), Vol. 1, P. 173.

2. Clarence Schettler, Public Opinion in American Society. (New York, 1960), p. 4.

In politics the term "public opinion" is used in connection with matters which are of public interest and concerns, what people think about the political system, the regime, the constitutional framework, the way issues are decided. It is a powerful, bold and unmeasurable force, which is not dependent on any particular type constitution. It changes the nations' way of living. Every type of system is ruled by public opinion, be it monarchy or democracy. It checks the government and keeps it on its toes.

The level of intensity at which public opinion functions and its actual significance in the life of a society are determined by existing social conditions, which include:

- 1) General Conditions - which are related to the nature of productive relations, the class structure of the society, the level of development of productive forces and culture, and so forth. And,
- 2) Specific Conditions - which are related to the stage of development of democratic institutions and freedom, above all, the freedom to express opinions - freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, and of demonstrations.

In a developed society the usual channels and forms for the expression of public opinion include elections for

governmental bodies, mass participation in legislative and executive functions, the press and other means of mass communication, meetings and demonstrations. Public opinion is also expressed or measured through referendum, mass discussions of problems, selective polls and letters.

The other side of the coin is the governments' efforts to influence public opinion. Censorship, propaganda, publicity these are tools which government use for this purpose.

Meaning of Public Opinion in Soviet Political System:-

The question of "real" attitudes of the Soviet people towards the social system and towards policies adopted by leadership interests not only specialists but all those who are interested in knowing about developments in the USSR in general. In many ways one of the crucial questions for understanding the Soviet Union is the role of public opinion in the Soviet political system. To what extent people's opinion is being taken into consideration in working out the public policies, to what extent can people speak out and what impact does public opinion have upon the decision makers - these are some of the issues which call for serious examination.

The emergence of a visible public opinion in 60s - expressed, measured, and reported - and of public opinion research in Soviet Union has surprised some Western observers and has been analysed by a few of them. The need to study the role of public opinion in the Soviet political system is obvious. Due to the increasing role of the individual in socialist society, the need for the study of public opinion is also becoming important. It has become firmly established in the political dictionary of the Communist World. The experience of building socialism and communism confirms that public opinion is an important factor in political, ideological and legal decision - making, and exercises strong influence on the functioning of all elements of the political system of the Soviet Union. It has been an important motive force in the development of Soviet society and plays a greater role than in the past in solving the problems facing Soviet society.

The meaning of public opinion in the Soviet political system is different from that in the Western system. In Soviet thinking public opinion is a sum total of ideas and views on various social problems reflecting the economic, social and other **realities** accepted by various groups and

sections of the population. Soviet society is different from other societies. It is free from class contradictions, where people are free from exploitation. All power belongs to the entire working population of the country. So people have common interests in regard to all vital aspects of life. There is a near perfect congruence between leadership policy and mass opinion. The mass media which is the barometer of discovering and expressing, informing and shaping public opinion, represent the entire people. Soviet political scientist R.A. Safarov who states that " there are no " antagonistic contradictions" between the people and the government organs, at the same time urges that opinion surveys be conducted in order to "discover in time contradictions (within each social group and among them, between the public will and law) and take measures for their resolution by democratic methods inherent in socialist government".³

Socialist public opinion is nonantagonistic. Hence basic methods of opinion research in Soviet society are letters, press, parliamentary decisions, sample survey, public discussions and public documents.

3. Walter D. Connor, Zvi Y. Gitelman and others, Public Opinion in European Socialist Systems (New York, London, 1977), p. 15.

To study public opinion in Soviet political system, we have to go back to the history of public opinion in the Soviet Russia. Old Russia was under the autocratic rule of the Tsars, as the emperors were called, who held absolute power. People had to obey their command. There was no parliament and no general elections. There were ministers in charge of various government departments, but they were dismissed by the Tsar on his will. The autocracy did not consult the people in anything, except when forced by circumstances. The Russians were unaware of citizens' rights and liberties. There was rigid control over press and literature. The common man of Russia knew nothing about the freedom of press, of opinion, or of assembly. They were beyond his mental horizon. Parliament, Constitution, President, Prime Minister, legislature, initiative, referendum all these words were quite obscure to him.

In this way there was complete absence of democratic traditions, although from time to time some steps were taken like - emancipation of serfs and peasants' reforms, they could not satisfy people because these reforms did not treat them as individuals and the exploitation of poor peasants continued. Recognition of the institutions of self-government - Zemstvo assemblies, which were established late in nineteenth

century at both district and provincial level, was also a step towards democratization. But their elections were indirect and they were hampered by the Tsarist regime. Under the pressure of the short lived "Revolution of 1905" a representative assembly "Duma" was formed, but one half of its members were nominated by the Tsar himself. It was also ineffective as a law - making body. In this way people were suppressed mercilessly under the Tsarist regime.

People wanted to get rid of this oppressive regime. Time and again, there were revolutionary upheavals in Tsarist Russia. But they were crushed by the government. The entire society was seething with discontent. But at the same time the vast majority of the Russians felt that their needs and hopes could and would be satisfied only by the Tsar and his government. Only in a minority (a small elite from among the intelligentsia) was having an awareness of this frustrating state of affairs, who through education had acquired consciousness of the need to reshape society. It was the work of the intelligentsia to create this consciousness among the masses as well. But all revolutionary movements or organizations of intelligentsia like - **Decemberist movement, populist movement, Zemlya i volya** - (land and liberty) etc.

failed in Russia because they could not easily establish contact with the broad sections of the population. Hence they did not enjoy mass support and could not impart revolutionary consciousness among the masses. There was need of mass support to revolutionary movement of the intelligentsia.

The beginning of the twentieth century brought a radical change in the intelligentsia's relations with the masses when Lenin emerged as a leader of the masses. He showed a great concern for the masses because he could draw a practical lesson from the plot of assassinating the Tsar in 1887, in which his brother was executed. The lesson was that a revolutionary struggle can not be successful on the basis of individual acts of terrorism. It should draw the participation of the majority of the people. It (revolutionary struggle) must be based on the combined and disciplined efforts of an elite which should direct the masses.

Lenin was the first Marxist who stressed the Marxist saying that proletarian class consciousness is the agent of revolution, which was neglected more and more by the Russian Marxists in the late nineteenth century. Lenin always stuck

to his agreement adding to it the saying of the founding fathers (Marx and Engels) of Communism that "the emancipation of proletariat can never be anything else than the work of the proletariat itself"⁴ He wrote that "we are all convinced that the emancipation of the workers can only be brought by the workers themselves; a socialist revolution is out of the question unless the masses become class conscious, organized, trained, and educated by open class struggle against the entire bourgeoisie!"⁵

But Lenin found in working class only trade union consciousness which could not think about the interests of their class as a whole, and could pursue only for less important narrow sectional interests. He saw the spontaneity of the working class - increasing demonstrations which led to the development of economism, not to a genuine revolutionary feeling. So there was need to awaken the revolutionary feeling and essential political class consciousness of the masses

4. Alfred G. Meyer, Leninism (New York, 1972), p. 25.

5. V.I. Lenin, Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution (Calcutta, 1942), pp. 89-90.

which Lenin realized "could only be brought to them from without".⁶ From without he meant from a revolutionary party which was to be led by the real political leaders of the entire people and must be secret, concentrated, restricted and highly organized group, whose members whether drawn from workers or intelligentsia, had to be professional revolutionaries, men who were carefully trained, schooled and experienced and capable of converting the initially spontaneous and distinguished workers' movement into a conscious and organized force, fighting for socialism. Lenin knew that the masses would not instinctively go in for the revolution and insisted that the impetus for revolution must come from this party of professional revolutionaries. He compared the Party with the general staff of the army without which it was impossible to win the battle.⁷ Lenin found such an organization necessary as he declared that without it "no class in modern society is capable of conducting a determined struggle."⁸ He observed that "not a single class in history has achieved power without producing its political leaders,

6. Alex Inkeles, Public Opinion in Soviet Russia(Massachusetts, 1967), p. 13

7. Ibid. pp. 14-15.

8. Ibid. p. 14.

its prominent, representatives, able to organize a movement and lead it".⁹

But at the same time Lenin did not believe that leaders alone could make history. It was obvious to him that the organization of professional revolutionaries could not alone effect a successful revolution. It comes about only when vast, so far passive sections of the people awaken and take an active part in political life. "A basis of mass support was indispensable, and to think of acting without it was mere political "adventurism".¹⁰ Lenin warned that to throw this vanguard (party) alone into the battle "would not merely be folly, but a crime. It was necessary prior to accepting a decisive challenge for power, to be certain that the broad masses had taken up a position "either of direct support of the vanguard, or at least of benevolent neutrality towards it".¹¹

Lenin believed that consciousness turns into power only with the help of the masses of the population. He

9. V.I. Lenin, "The Urgent Tasks of Our Movement", Selected Works (New York, 1943), Vol. 11, p.14

10. Alex Inkeles, no.6, p. 14

11. V.I. Lenin, Selected Works vol.X, p. 136.

wrote that "theory becomes material force only when it takes hold of the masses".¹² "Power, he said, must be based . . . unconditionally on the majority of the population."¹³ He believed that "living, creative socialism is the product of the masses themselves".¹⁴

Even though Lenin disdained the opinions and the leadership of the majority, he had a very healthy respect for the public opinion when he faced the problems of ensuring the success of revolutionary or other public action. Right from the moment of its birth he tried to make the Party a mass party in full sense of the term, enjoying the sympathy and support of the masses, whose policies and practice expresses their vital interests. He believed that "we can administer only when we express correctly what the people are conscious of. Unless we do this the communist party will not lead the proletariat, the proletariat will not lead the masses . . ." ¹⁵ He said - "Live in the midst. Know the moods, know everything. Understand the masses. Find the approach. Win its absolute trust. This concise formulation, which is almost in the form of a summary, contains the principles of the tactics and strategy of the party, s work among the

12. Alfred G. Meyer, no.4, p. 38

13. Ibid., pp.38-39

14. Reprints from the Soviet Press, Vol. 34 (Jan-June),
15 May 1982, p. 7

15. V.I. Lenin, Collected Works Vol.33, p. 304

masses, and the program for deepening the close organic bond with the people".¹⁶ He insisted that the Party should rely on the masses, their experience, their enthusiasm, energy and must be ready to learn from them. It should have a "a good ear" for the voice of the masses. He never ceased emphasising that it is the masses who will have to carry out the policy of the party, and the party therefore remains an insignificant sect if it does not obtain (Lenin said " Conquer") a working majority.

Besides winning the confidence and support of the broad masses of the working people (which Lenin found most necessary for revolution) the Party had to win, he insisted, support of the other classes. The experience of the 1905 Revolution has taught that the success of a new revolutionary bid for power could be ensured only by joint actions of workers and peasants. For showing such big concern for public opinion he was even accused of having become an opportunist who wanted the Party, to get stuck in the morass of public opinion.

16. K. Chernenko, "The CPSU's Leninist Tradition Working for and with the People," World Marxist Review (London) Vol.22, no.5, May 1979, p. 3.

According to Lenin's ideas his party did everything for the interests of the working people, it reacted attentively to their feelings and responded sensitively to their requirements, always taking them into consideration in its policies and everyday activities. It was always the party of the masses in all circumstances. Hence people trusted Lenin and rose up in the battle with the Party only after observing that the revolutionary Party had won the majority of the people to its side, Lenin proclaimed that "victory of the revolution was assured because the majority of the people have already sided with it. The majority of the people are with us. Our victory is assured".¹⁷ Throughout revolution he paid a great attention to mass support and mass mood. He wanted to obtain a firm hold of political power through mass support. Only then could the party translate consciousness into reality.

He gave the credit for the victory of October Revolution to the will and action of the millions of Soviet people. He argued that the revolution had been fought to establish the

17. V.I. Lenin, no.15, vol.26, p. 22

power of the entire people and remarked " we are not Blanquists, we are not in favour of the seizure of power by a minority".¹⁸ He viewed the victory of the October Revolution as giving rights and freedom to the people and opening up vast new opportunities for them to participate actively in political life which did not exist before. He said :

" For the first time in history of the civilized society, the masses of the population will rise to taking an independent part, not only in voting and elections, but also in the everyday administration of the state".¹⁹

After the victory of October Revolution, power taken by party on behalf of the people was viewed by him not for power's sake, but for the sake of leadership which would lead the whole people to socialism as their teacher and guide. The idea of proletarian democracy was deeply rooted

18. V.I. Lenin, no.11, vol. 6, p. 29.

19. V.I. Lenin, no.15, vol.25, pp.487-488.

in the mind of the party. When he was chosen as head of the government elected by the entire people, On the first day itself, he said : " we want a government to be always under the supervision of the public opinion of its country".²⁰ His government always expressed the cherished aspirations and fundamental interests of the working people. It was shown by his "Decree on Peace" and " Decree on Land" when he explained - " The vast majority of the peasants, soldiers, and workers are in favour of policy of peace. This is not the policy of Bolsheviks, it is not a party policy at all; but it is the policy of the workers, soldiers and peasants, that is, of the majority of the people. We are not carrying out the program of the Bolsheviks, and in agrarian matters our program has been taken entirely from the mandate of the peasants".²¹ It was for the first time when will of the masses was asserted.

Although Lenin exercised great influence in the Party and he also headed the government, he did not go so far as to

20. R. Safarov, " Public Opinion Under Developed Socialism", Socialism : Theory and Practice (Moscow), vol. 2, Feb - 1978, p. 83.

21. Alfred G. Meyer, no. 4, p. 42.

suggest that he alone had the right to determine policy even for his own party. He encouraged collectivism in the party, which, in his views was not a weakness but a strength of leadership. He also encouraged self-criticism within the party. He said that every member should be free to speak his mind about the manner in which policy was carried out and point out its shortcomings. It was he, who initiated the method of the socialist state's administration and government based on public opinion. He stressed the political potential of public opinion and demanded that it should be revealed and taken due account of when resolving acute and controversial political issues. He held that certain aspects of politics should be decided on the strength of public opinion polls. The democratic method of voting was not merely proclaimed but also used for 'an open and all - round discussion of controversial issues'. For example - on the question of concluding the Brest Litovsk Treaty with Germany, Lenin was voted down in the Party. During the first years after the Revolution local polls were frequently held on nationality questions.

Lenin had fought for the extension of Constitutional human rights and democratic institutions. Thus after coming

into power from the first days of the Soviet state, democracy was vividly manifested not only in the free expression of the people's will, but also in their active participation in governing the country. Soviets, the most democratic institutions of the people, which were suppressed in the Tsarist regime and through which people had participated directly in revolution, were hailed by Lenin as "an authority open to all, which carries out all its functions before the eyes of the masses, springs directly from masses and is a direct and immediate instrument of the popular masses, of their will".²² People were given right to elect representatives through which they could express their will.

But he was not satisfied only with this representative democracy. He wanted the system to be more democratic and to make people realise that they are the real makers of their country. Hence in 1918 he emphasised Right to Recall, a form of direct democracy, - through which people not only have the right to elect their representatives but right to recall them back if they do not justify their trust. He said :

22. V. I. Lenin, No. 15, vol.10, p. 245.

"No elective institution or representative assembly can be regarded as being truly democratic and really representative of the people's will unless the electors' right to recall those elected is accepted and exercised. The system of proportional representation is more democratic than the majority system, it demands more complex measures for the exercise of the right to recall, that is, the actual subordination of the elected to the people. But it would be betraying democracy and abdicating the basic principles and tasks of the socialist revolution, which has begun in Russia, to refuse, on that ground, to practise the right to recall, or to hamper or restrict its exercise in any way." ²³ He further said: "The Soviets have been created by the working people themselves, by their revolutionary energy and initiative and that is the only guarantee of their work entirely to promote the interests of the masses. Failure to grant the right to recall from the constituent assembly is failure to elicit the revolutionary will of the people, it is usurpation of the people's rights. We do have proportional representation, which is indeed the most democratic, under this system, it may be somewhat difficult to introduce the right to recall. So the direct consistent and immediate democratic principle, namely

23. V.I. Lenin, no. 15, vol. 26, p. 336

the right to recall must be introduced".²⁴

When the Constitution of the RSFSR was adopted on 10 July 1918, the Right to Recall was included in it. As Article 78 of the first Constitution said:

" Electors shall have the right to recall at any time the deputy they have sent to the Soviet and to hold new elections in accordance with the general statute".²⁵



Another form of direct democracy was suggested in the electors' mandate - a sort of programme which expressed the will and opinion of the electorate and by which People's Deputies were bound. They had to keep it in mind and implement it. The representatives were also asked to report regularly to their electors and systematically inform the population about their work and discussions adopted. In this way, public opinion was always given an important place in Lenin's mode of governance.

Freedom of press, which provides for the ordinary

24. Ibid., pp. 338-339

25. Aryeh L. Unger, Constitutional Development in the USSR (London; 1981), p. 38

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citizen to look at authority with critical eyes and freedom of speech were encouraged and guaranteed by Lenin's government. He viewed freedom of press as freedom to publish any opinion of any citizen, but he found private ownership incompatible with the freedom of press. So the material dependence of the newspapers was abolished in 1918 by the first RSFSR Constitution. He believed that press must belong to the working people and express their interests. It should have close ties with the masses. He stated that the independence of the press rests in the closest dependence on the working class. Press and mass media of Lenin's government based themselves on public opinion on a wider scale. It belonged to the whole people and served their interests.

Critical letters and complaints sent by citizens to state and Party bodies, which is one of the best form to link the press with the masses, were also encouraged under Lenin's government. The Central office of the Council of People's Commissars (CPC) received about 10,000 letters of this kind a year, many of which are reported to have been taken into account in the elaboration of government decrees and instructions, and many citizens were also received directly at the Council of People's Commissars (CPC's) reception office.²⁶

26. Stephen White, "Political Communication in the USSR: Letters to Party, State and Press", Political Studies (London), Vol. 31, no.1, March 1983, p.44

In all these ways Lenin tried to make the system more democratic and to take public opinion into account as much as possible. He did not want the masses to conclude that they had supported no real revolution but a mere change from one authoritarian state to another. Therefore in his last days when he saw Stalin, trying to concentrate too much power in his hands by assuming the post of the Party General Secretary, he advised his followers to remove him from the post.

Thus, we find that constant and close attention to the experience of the masses, faith in their inexhaustible creative potential, an ability to translate their ambitions and interests into clear political slogans and action programmes run through the entire history of Leninism. Lenin's patience and his habit of identifying himself with the masses was really remarkable. Wherever destiny took him, wherever he found himself and in whatever he did, he was always in touch with the common people through a thousand links. He felt an organic need to meet and talk with the people, who carried out the revolution and built socialism.

CHAPTER - II

STALIN'S PERSONALITY CULT AND ECLIPSE OF PUBLIC
OPINION.

CHAPTER -II-

STALIN'S PERSONALITY CULT AND ECLIPSE OF PUBLIC OPINION

The prolonged illness and death of Lenin created a vacuum in Soviet leadership. Infact, the struggle for succession started with Lenin's first stroke in 1922. This struggle was a clash of personalities rather than of doctrines between Trotsky and Stalin. Trotsky was an outstanding revolutionary leader who played an important part in the October Revolution and the Civil War. Being the top organiser of the Red Army he was considered Lenin's natural successor. On the other hand, Stalin was also rapidly building up his power through his control of the Party's Central Secretariat, as he was appointed General Secretary of the Party in 1922, a position of enormous power in the Party and therefore in the country.

Within a short time it became clear that victory would rest ultimately with Joseph Stalin, because as General Secretary of the Party he was in a position to manipulate that vast bureaucratic structure. Most of the Bolshevik leaders were then not aware of the enormous potential of the office of General Secretary of the Party, and they

combined with Stalin against Trotsky as they were fearful of Trotsky - a "man on horseback" - a potential military dictator.¹ Moreover, Trotsky was a latecomer to the Party, and as a successor was a black mark in the eyes of the men who had worked with Lenin in the dark days of exile before the revolution.²

Stalin in a triumvirate with Zinoviev and Kamenev strove to prevent Trotsky from taking over the leadership. He claimed himself to be the loyal pupil of Lenin and accused Trotsky of breaking the Party unity. He declared Trotsky's opposition to one man monopoly as expressing the temper, mood and aspirations of the nonproletarian elements in and outside the Party. Besides, Trotsky's aloofness precipitated his downfall. He also proved himself unskilful in the art of political intrigue. From the vantage point of the General Secretaryship, Stalin was able to defeat Trotsky and come to power.

But due to his ruthlessness and crudeness and cruel policies of industrialization and collectivization, Stalin's followers also gradually started opposing him. Stalin, using his position as General Secretary was able to make

1. Darrell P. Hammer, USSR: The Politics of Oligarchy (Hinsdale, Illinois, 1974), p.40

2. Ibid., p.38

strategic appointments in the organisation and to oust his opponents - not only from the Party, but from the government as well. Having defeated the Trotskyist radicals who favoured the immediate support of world-wide revolutions as opposed to his plan to perfect "socialism in one country", Stalin then moved firmly to suppress his right-wing opponents one by one.³ Open appeal to party rank and file was not tolerated by leadership.

This struggle for power lasted from 1924 to the end of 1929. In this inner-party struggle (concerned with policy as much as power) Stalin was able to defeat and outplay all his Chief rivals from their leading positions by the end of 1929. They were shot or executed. Thus Stalin emerged as the undisputed leader of the Party. The party was now referred to as Leninist - Stalinist Party. He was hailed by the people as their leader. He became the "Lenin of Today".⁴

3. Harry G. Shaffer, ed., The Soviet Political System in Theory and Practice (New York, 1965), p. 58

4. M. Fainsod, How Russia is Ruled. Rev. ed. (Bombay, 1969), p. 160.

This growth of Stalin's cult was a deliberate result of controlled propaganda made by Stalin himself and by his Party apparatus. On his fiftieth birthday in 1929, the entire Soviet press and radio network were mobilized to sing his praises. It was celebrated by the whole nation. Party propagandists vied with one another in tributes to his greatness. Posters, portraits, statues of Stalin appeared everywhere. " He was hailed as 'the great continuator of Lenin's work', 'the great leader of the people', 'the leader of the international working class and of all progressive humanity' and a 'commander og genius'" ⁵ This formalising and regularising of the Stalin cult became part of the official ritual calendar. It became an essential part of all great public occasions such as Party Conferences and Congresses, the celebration on May Day, Red Army Day, 7 November and Constitution Day (5 December) and Stalin's birthday". ⁶ Officials, writers and artists were compelled to worship Stalin on public occasions at all times. On his seventieth birthday also in 1949 he was whole heartedly praised by the press and

5. L.G. Churchward, Soviet Socialism: Social and Political Essays (London, New York, 1987), P. 124.

6. Ibid., p. 125

and the Party. An article by Marshal K.E. Voroshilov provides a clear example of this which began thus:

" On December 21, 1949, the Soviet people, together with all progressive mankind, is celebrating the seventieth birthday of the greatest man of our planet - their wise leader, teacher, indefatigable champion of peace and the independence of peoples, the builder of a new human society, and the Commander of genius".⁷

In this manner the cult of Stalin was given a powerful impetus by the Soviet press and Party propaganda.

"At the same time the Stalin cult was partly a natural growth also. Its popular basis lay chiefly in the popularity of his policies of building socialism in Russia and it was very strong amongst working-class recruits to the party during the 1920s and 1930s. This spontaneous admiration of Stalin was amongst many sections of Soviet society. Stalin was taken as the cause and symbol of Soviet industrialization and modernisation.

7. Ibid.

He was even presented in popular verse as a demi-god with cities growing with amazing rapidity wherever he planted his feet." ⁸

Stalin's policy of collectivization to overthrow bourgeoisie by throwing off Kulak bondage, through which instead of proceeding gradually and by means of persuasion coercion was applied to move at breakneck speed, taking a toll of approximately 5 million deaths, was directly supported by millions of peasants. It was an evidence of general peasant acceptance of the Soviet regime. The workers and youth also not only warmly greeted but actively participated in the collectivization and industrialization campaign and gave a certain legitimacy to the cult of personality. The second world war also strengthened and further developed the phenomenon of personality cult when taking over as the head of government also Stalin led his country to victory. He was given full support by the people and was hailed as a 'genius' and the 'father of the people'. To some extent incredible

8. Ibid., p. 124

difficulties attended the building of socialism, and complicated international and domestic situation which called for iron discipline, a high degree of vigilance and the strictest centralization of leadership made the personality cult natural.

In the period of Stalin's personality cult there was complete eclipse of public opinion. As the General Secretary of the Party he held absolute power for himself, and free discussions and collective decision-making were replaced by his personality cult. He ruled by terrorising the people and secret police was an important instrument of his rule which attempted to minimise the average citizen's independent political initiatives. He originated the term 'enemy of the people' and whoever dared to go against him was arrested or physically eliminated under this label. Hundreds of thousands of completely innocent people were arrested and killed on the charge of anti-Soviet activities. The great purge was a proof that no criticism of Stalin's rule was tolerated. People suffered heavy oppression. There prevailed an atmosphere of fear, suspicion, and uncertainty in Soviet society which poisoned the life of the people. The people were fearful that any

time they might be subjected to arbitrary arrest and punishment without the due process of law. Hence the people did not have the courage to oppose Stalin and they had to glorify him out of fear rather than respect, with almost superstitious veneration and unquestioned acceptance of everything that he said.

Stalins' cult imposed itself over the wishes of the masses. All democratic institutions of the Soviet system were totally paralysed during Stalin's period. The Party which is regarded as a true forum for expressing public opinion was fully controlled by Stalin. The character of the Party was drastically changed. It was transformed into a high bureaucratic machine. Party had become a disciplined military phalanx. Opposition was an mutiny. The function of the Commander was to issue order and all party members were bound to obey him, otherwise they were tactily punished. "He acted not through persuasion, explanation and patient, cooperation with people, but by imposing his concepts and demanding absolute submission to his opinion. Whoever opposed his concept or tried to prove his viewpoint and the correctness of his position, was doomed to removal from the leading

collective and to subsequent moral and physical annihilation. This was true during the period following the XVII Party Congress, when many prominent Party leaders and rank-and-file Party workers, honest and dedicated to the cause of Communism fell victim of Stalin's despotism." ⁹ At all levels of system the style of party leadership became more hierarchical and unquestioning and blind obedience became the rule.

The basic principle of 'inner-party democracy' which stipulates the right to discuss freely questions of policy and to criticise any leader, regardless of his position vanished from the Party. Democratic discussion of Party politics ceased to exist. Though Stalin on many occasions spoke about the need for inner-party democracy, it was never put into practice. He never realised that genuine freedom of criticism and the open clash of opinion might be a creative ferment keeping a party mentally alive and vigorous self-criticism if it was there anytime in the Party, was not directed against Soviet leaders, against the doctrines of the Communist Party. On the contrary, it

9. Harry G. Shaffer, no.3, p. 86

was always in the name of the Soviet leaders, in the name of the Party doctrines. Party members did not have the right to criticise high command decisions. Party apparatus served as the institutionalized projection of his will. For Stalin the suppression of disagreement and the crushing of opposition became the key to survival. The Party ceased to be a creative association which shaped policy and transformed into an instrument in the hands of the dictator, a privileged chorus of sycophants who sang his praises and enforced his will. In Stalin's period Party membership also decreased by more than 1.6 million between 1930 to 1938. Stalin's drastic purges in the mid-1930s weeded out more than half the members of the party.¹⁰ No new members were admitted between January 1933 and November 1936.¹¹

Party Congresses which were supposed to meet at least once every three years became less frequent in the Stalin period.

10. Karel Hulicka and Irenl M. Hulicka ., Soviet Institutions : The Individual and Society (Boston, 1967), p. 78

11. L.G. Churchward, no. 5, p. 128.

Table - 1 : Party Congresses

Congress	Year
14th	1925
15th	1927
16th	1930
17th	1934
18th	1939
19th	1952

Source :- Medish Vadim, - ' The Soviet Union. Second Edition; (New Jersey 1984), p. 93

Thus there was a gap of three years between the meeting of the fourteenth and fifteenth Congress and of five years between the sixteenth and the seventeenth Congresses, which met respectively in 1930 and 1934. The eighteenth Congress did not meet until 1939, some five years later, and the nineteenth did not take place until 1952, i.e., after an interval of more than thirteen years. All this shows that meeting of the Party Congress depended on the will of Stalin and not follow any rule. Under Stalin, Congresses were transformed into rallies of Party and state functionaries who assembled to applaud and ratify the policies decided by the supreme leader. Party Congresses ceased to provide a platform for airing divergent views. All decision were unanimous, and gave every outward evidence of having been carefully planned in advance to

to reach a pre-ordained result.

Soviets which were considered to be the only mass organisations expressing the will of the masses and through which people were expected to participate directly in the political life, existed merely for the show under Stalin's rule. They lost most of whatever democratic content they had once possessed. All Soviets representing the people on the basis of their place of work or professions rather than on their place of residence were abolished. All Soviets now became territorial. They were converted from bodies of popular power at all levels into appendages of Party organisations. They became silent instruments for the fulfilment of Party directives. Permanent Party offices were created at every level of the administrative structure. Discussion in the Soviets on any question or draft was not regarded as a necessary step in Stalin's days. Disregard for opinion of the Supreme Soviet was such that budgets were submitted for its approval after they had already been in effect for half a year. They met very rarely - for a few days just for a formality. In the war time also the Supreme Soviet had no part in decision-making, or organising

war efforts.

The system of electing members of various Soviets was also changed. Earlier only members of the lowest level Soviets were elected directly by the voters while the membership of high level Soviets consisted of elected representatives from levels immediately below. This system was replaced by a multiballot, direct election to the Soviets on several levels. As a result, the personal contact between the voters and the candidates was lost. The same changes occurred in relation between members of lower and higher Soviets. Soviets began to be completely subordinated to the Party Committees. When a new constitution was made in 1936, it proclaimed that the Soviets possess all political power. But what actually happened was just the opposite. During the years of Stalin's rule, Soviets were completely subordinated to the Party machine. Thus, Party and the Soviets, both democratic institutions were directed by the will of the Supreme leader.

During the Stalin era, it was propagated that all major decisions were based on the collective agreement of the top party leaders and on public opinion. But in reality decision-making was centralised. Stalin made all important decisions himself. Using his unlimited power, acting in the name of the Central Committee,

Stalin did not ask even for the opinion of the Committee members, nor of the members of the Politburo. He did not inform them about his decisions concerning very important Party and government matters. The members of the decision-making body-the Politburo were like servants and for their survival they had to be loyal to him. This was personal dictatorship in the most absolute sense of the term.

In this type of atmosphere consultation of public opinion on any decision was a far cry. Stalin never felt need of public opinion on any matter. Although the draft of the 1936 Constitution was put for nationwide discussion, proposals for amendment were invited, it was just to show the world that the people of the Soviet Union approve the work of their leaders, that the Soviet Union is a true democracy and it enjoys the full support of the Soviet people.¹² In reality people were so much suppressed that if any decision was put for public discussion, they did not have the courage to criticise Stalin's decisions. They had to support his policies due to fear of punishment. Therefore, public opinion on government's decision if any,

12. M. Fainsod, no.4, p. 371

was of no importance in the Stalin period. It was just a formality to consolidate the regime.

Under Stalin's rule, freedom of press, freedom of speech, assembly, demonstration through which people can express their opinion and get the chance to criticise the government, were guaranteed in Article 125 of the new Constitution of 1936.¹³ But they were merely written on paper. In practice they were not followed. They were not to be used to criticise or challenge the ascendancy of the Party leadership. The meaning of freedom in the Soviet Constitutional lexicon was to ratify the policies of the ruling group and not the right to criticise them.

Press and other means of mass communication which are intended to serve the workers' interests and are responsible for keeping people informed were fully controlled by the Party either directly or through the governmental organisations. Since they were controlled by the Party leadership, all media of Communication were expected to contribute in

13. Ibid., p. 377

their own ways to the goals enunciated by the leadership. There was no liberty of expression for writers. The primary task of the press was to praise in full columns the inspired leadership of the great Father of the Peoples and to devote more space to record-breaking economic achievements than to the legitimate complaints of citizens. There was censorship on the appearance of harmful printed matter (to leadership's image) and in 1931 Glavlit (censorship agency) was formed to restrict the circulation of party objectionable works. In 1947 even the head of the Communist Party's Propaganda Department, Gueoge F. Alexandrov, the author of a history of pre-Marxist philosophy was censored for having fallen into "the captivity of bourgeois historians of philosophy."

Letters to government, Party and press through which people can express their views and criticise the government, also began to receive less attention during the Stalin period. ¹⁴ Under Lenin 'work with letters' was given great importance, but under Stalin's rule it was completely neglected. The formal right to write letters still existed

14. Stephen White, "Political Communications in the USSR: Letters to Party, State and Press", Political Studies, vol.31, no.1, March 1983, p. 44

but due to fear people did not have the courage to write against acts of arbitrariness by state and Party officials.

Thus in Stalin's period there was total eclipse of public opinion. It was a dictatorial rule, euphemistically called the 'cult of Stalin's personality' and condemned as a deviation from the norms, where all power rested in the hands of a small group of the party leaders, above all in the hands of Stalin who alone had the right to decide all questions. The party members in turn were publicly committed to defend and faithfully execute the decisions of the leadership. Government was subordinate to the Party leadership. The entire state and Party apparatus were under his direction. It was citizens' duty to approve the programme of the Party leadership. This rule was based on high coercion and low information. Coercion itself tended to maximise distortion in the upward flow of information. People were less informed. They knew only as much as they were informed. Thus, Stalin came about as close as possible to achieving absolute power.

Although from time-to-time Stalin declared that popular will would be a decisive factor everywhere, that public

opinion would be consulted on the decisions taken by government, in practice he never paid any attention to the public opinion. He believed that the free public flow of ideas would somehow limit his own freedom of action. Hence he chose the path of coercion and terrorised the people in such a way that the society as a whole lost the capacity and the habit of forming its own opinion. There was no articulate opposition to the Stalinist system of government. Public opinion was unanimous on all issues of importance because every kind of thought was constrained by fear of offending the jealous, suspicious master of the Kremlin.

To conclude, the picture of Stalin's regime was one of individual rule where public opinion was ignored and its expression stage-managed to conform with the leader's own whims and fancies with a view to legitimising it.

CHAPTER - III

DE- STALINISATION AND RE-EMERGENCE OF PUBLIC
OPINION

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DE-STALINISATION AND RE-EMERGENCE OF PUBLIC OPINION

With the death of Stalin a whole era in Soviet history came to an end. The task of preserving and modernising the state which was inherited from Stalin, was taken by a new leadership. Stalin's successor N.S. Khrushchev took over the leadership as First Secretary of the Party by mid-1953. The new leadership found Stalin's dictatorial method of governance unsuitable. After the grim regime of Stalin the country most urgently needed the sense of renewal, the hope of a healthier relationship between the governors and the governed. It also implored the public not to succumb to 'disorder and panic'. It found people wanting to get rid of this totalitarian rule. On the other hand, Khrushchev himself, unlike Stalin, wanted the change as he was a man of action rather than a theorist. The new leadership felt the need to find out new ways of ruling the country.

Most of the Party leaders believed that to rectify the unhealthy situation created by Stalin's dictatorship drastic remedial action was essential. Therefore, first of all the new leadership proceeded to abolish the

heritage of the late dictator. A process of de-Stalinisation was started by which the Stalinist elements had to be extracted from Soviet politics. A full-scale campaign against the 'cult of personality' was launched by Khrushchev. From 1953 there was a reversal of some of Stalin's policies and a certain coldness toward his authority. The new leadership courageously exposed governmental shortcomings, arbitrary and illegal acts, which had been committed by individual officials. Party leaders admitted that grave excesses had occurred during Stalin era. Stalin's name which during the last few years had appeared on an average forty to sixty times on a single page of Pravda, gradually faded out after the beginning of April 1953 and even on his birth or death anniversary his name was mentioned in a much more restrained fashion.

In the Twentieth Party Congress the de-Stalinisation campaign reached its height when Stalin was openly criticised by leading Communists for his autocratic rule. Various crimes of the Stalin era were publicly condemned. His pictures were removed from the Congress Hall. Khrushchev completely neglected Stalin in his seven-hour report

(his name was mentioned only once). In his secret speech Khrushchev coined the phrase "cult of personality" and frontally attacked "secret police domination of Soviet life, heavy-handed leadership styles"¹ and many other beliefs and practices which had been taken for granted in Stalin's time. He rehearsed Stalin's crimes particularly those against the Party. He remarked:

"(He) began to trample crudely on the methods of collectivity in leadership to order people around and push aside the personnel of Soviet and economic organisations (He) decided questions great and small by himself, completely ignoring the opinions of others.

(He) flattered himself with the belief that all (improvements) were due only to his own merits".²

Stalin's picture which were hung in every public office began to come down. Statues of Stalin were destroyed. His books were taken off the open shelves in public libraries. His body was removed from the mausoleum in

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1. George W. Breslawer, Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Leaders: Building Authority in Soviet Politics. (London, 1982) p. 59
 2. Abraham Brumbery, ed., Russia Under Khrushchev (New York, 1962), p.224.

the Red Square, and Stalingrad became Volgograd.

This anti-Stalinist campaign was justified as an effort to exorcise the 'cult of personality' from the contemporary Soviet political life and to erect reliable guarantees against its return. In the wake of the twentieth Party Congress "greater popular involvement in public affairs, expanded rights, collective leadership, and expanded socialist input"³ and official organ's close ties with the masses were put as the basic principles of Soviet system of government. It was declared that "phenomena of this kind would never again arise in the Party and country".⁴ Every attack on the Stalinist cult, every attempt to reduce its role in the creation of Soviet society carried with it a demand for society's democratisation and to restore Leninist norms in Soviet society. Criticism of Stalin was aimed at extending socialist democracy. A trend towards greater freedom of discussion within the Communist Party and, infact, in Soviet society

3. George W. Breslawer, Khrushchev and Brezhnev as leaders : Building Authority in Soviet Politics (London, 1982), p. 59

4. History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Moscow, 1960) pp. 670-671.

as a whole was a great result of the de-Stalinisation campaign. This anti-Stalinist campaign made it clear that the new leadership wanted a democratised system. It wanted the people to participate in the Soviet system of government.

Terror as a system of rule was eliminated in the process of de-Stalinisation. An amnesty was declared. Many of the victims of Stalin's terror were released from imprisonment. Many of those who had been killed were re-habilitated posthumously. Citizens who under Stalin were without rights, now began to enjoy political freedom. They could express their views and influence policies of the regime. Apparantly, the immediate post-Stalin leadership sensed considerable apathy among the masses who had been terrorised by Stalin.

The principle of "collective leadership" was proclaimed as the basic principle of the Party against individual dictatorship to restore and further elaborate Leninist norms of party life. Khrushchev maintained that the leadership must be based on the collective principle and on the correct Marxist-Leninist policy with the active and

participation of millions of people. The solution of every major question relating to the Party, government, the economy or culture must be preceded in the Soviet political system by discussions, exchanges of opinions and education of collective experience in order that the decision adopted would not be one-sided and would preclude errors. By the declaration of this principle of collective leadership within the Party at all levels, Soviet democracy was re-established. Beria - whose control of the police apparatus threatened the survival of the collective - was arrested and subsequently executed. Later on, new party program adopted at the 22nd Congress in 1961 consolidated it as the Party Rules stated:

" The supreme principle of Party leadership is collective leadership, which is an absolute requisite for the normal functioning of party organisations, the proper education of cadets, and the promotion of the activity and initiative of Communists. The cult of the individual and the violations of inner-party democracy resulting from it must not be tolerated in the Party - they are incompatible with the Leninist principles of party life".⁵

5. Rules of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union
(Moscow, 1976), p. 16.

The system which emerged in the process of de-Stalinisation was a democratic system where all democratic institutions which were totally paralysed in the Stalin period had been revived. The personal relationship between the leadership and the people changed. An appeal was made for popular participation to reform the deeply ingrained bureaucratic habits of Soviet officialdom.

Party - one of the most powerful channels for expressing public opinion - returned back to Lenin's principle of party, where people could express their opinions, could criticise the Party leadership. The new party programme adopted at the 22nd Congress in 1961 embodied important liberal innovations and concretely expressed the Party's democratic intentions. It proclaimed:

" The party regards the perfection of the principles of socialist democracy and their rigid observance as a most important taskThe transition to Communism means the fullest extension of personal freedom and the rights of Soviet citizens".⁶

6. Harry G. Shaffer, ed., The Soviet System in Theory and Practice (New York, 1965), p. 321.

Khrushchev wanted more initiative, more personal responsibility, more people actively participating in the work of piloting the Soviet society towards the goal of material abundance he called "Communism". He considered these goals attainable only if those in the ranks of the Party think for themselves and take a larger role in government - Party affairs. Therefore, Party members were given the right to discuss freely questions of Party policies at Party meetings and in the Party press and to introduce motions openly to express and uphold an opinion until the organisation adopted a decision. In the Khrushchevian period it became the duty of Party members to develop criticism and self-criticism boldly by unmasking shortcomings and striving for their removal. Suppression of any criticism was regarded as crime against the Party.

Party membership also increased very rapidly in the Khrushchev period. " It increased from 7.2 million in 1956 to 11.7 million in 1964. An effort was made to recruit more factory workers and peasants as members".⁷

7. John S. Reshester Jr., The Soviet Policy : Government and Politics in the USSR, Second edition, (New York, 1978), p. 109.

"Party Congresses were also convened more frequently:
The Twentieth in February 1956, the Twenty-first in January
-February, 1959 , and the Twenty-second in October 1961"⁸
as according to rule they were to meet at least once every
four years.

Table-1 Party Congresses

Congress	Years
20th	Feb - 14-25 1956
21st (extraordinary)	Jan -27 -Feb 5, 1959
22nd	October 17-31 1961

Source - John. S. Reshstar Jr. The Soviet Policy-
Government and Politics in the USSR.
Second Edition, New York, 1978. p. 117

Thus under Khrushchev's leadership a degree of regularity
in the convocation of Party Congresses was restored. Party
Congresses were used as a forum for generating an adversarial
relationship between officials and masses.

8. Michael T. Florinsky, Russia: A Shorty History,
Second Edition, (London, 1969), P. 592.

The Soviets, which are in the Soviet system regarded as one of the most important channels for drawing the masses into government work and the best platform for expressing the public opinion, and which were reduced to the function of rubber-stamping the decisions of the Party leadership during the Stalin period, were made as much democratic as possible in the post-Stalin period. In the Twentieth Congress there was an intense discussion about resuscitating the Soviets and making them more accountable to the masses. Their authority was strengthened. Their meetings were more frequently held which provided an opportunity for the public criticism of individual ministers and government policies. The Soviets began to take fairly active part in decision-making. Discussions on the budget and economic plans started taking place in the Soviets. All policies were adopted after considerable discussions in the Soviets as far example the Pension Law in 1956, Industrial Re-organisation in 1957, Educational Reform in 1958-59, etc.⁹ The people's right to recall deputies, introduced by Lenin as a direct form of democracy through which people could express their opinion also came into practice. In 1957

9. L.G. Churchward, Contemporary Soviet Government, Second Edition, (London and Henley, 1975), p.113

a deputy to the Latvian Supreme Soviet was recalled because of drunkenness and unsatisfactory performance of his duty. He was recalled not by the majority of the electorate which he represented but by the workers and employees of the Machine Tractor Station which had originally nominated him.¹⁰ This right to recall of deputies was legalised by a law of the USSR Supreme Soviet in October 1959 and by the Supreme Soviets of the Union Republics in following months.¹¹

In the Fifth(1958-62) and Sixth (1962-66) Supreme Soviets ten deputies were recalled either for "failing to justify the elector's trust" or for committing actions unworthy of their high calling"¹² A number of deputies were recalled from local Soviets.

In 1961, at the 22nd Congress, in place of the

10. Ibid., P. 109.

11. Ibid., P.

12. David Lane, Politics and Society in the USSR (London, 1970), P. 155.

dictatorship of proletariat the Soviet Union was declared a "state of the whole people"¹³ expressing the will and interests of workers, peasants and intellectuals, the working people of all nations and nationalities in the country. Khrushchev said: " Stalin's rule was a dictatorship based on force and repression, but now we have a state of the whole people in which all citizens share in power".¹⁴ In the Khrushchev period, a proposal was put forward for drafting of a new Constitution providing more rights and freedoms to the Soviet people and extending Soviet democracy. Khrushchev stated that the main task of this (future constitution) would be, " to raise socialist democracy to a still higher level, to provide even more solid guarantees for the democratic rights and freedom of the working people, to guarantee strict observance of socialist legality, to prepare the conditions for the transition to public, Communist self-government." ¹⁵

13. Darrell P. Hammer, USSR : The Politics of Oligarchy (Hinsdale, Illinois, 1974), P. 129

14. Ibid.

15. Harry G. Shaffer, no. 6, p. 333.

In this way we find that from the Twentieth Congress on, there was an increasing stress on democracy and development of democratic attitudes which meant the right of the great masses to be directly involved in running government and social affairs and in discussing and adopting legislation and measures of national as well as local importance. This struggle for democracy was, indeed, closely connected with the struggle for respect of public opinion, and a growing role for it in the solution of national problems.

Public discussions became quite regular in the post-Stalin period. Since 1956 there began a regular practice of holding public discussions on important legislations and party policies to get mass support, which also provided criticism of the details of central policy and allow for its modification before adoption. As examples of such modifications one can cite the Pension Law in 1956 and the Industrial Re-organisation Draft in March, 1957 wherein changes were made as a result of public discussions

16. L.G. Churchward, no.9.

In 1958-59 there was public discussion on the development of economy over the next seven years and in 1958-59 on Educational Reform. Like this, from time-to-time public discussions were held on different policies and these periodic public debates also stimulated and facilitated criticism of administrative failures since they provided a sort of "open criticism".

In the process of de-Stalinisation, public organisations embracing the entire population of the country, which are also one of the Chief channels for expressing the public opinion, were encouraged to play a broader part in the life of the country, assuming ever increasing responsibilities as they were totally under party control in Stalin period. The Trade Union, the Komsomol and other mass organisation of the working people were given the right to take part in solving political, economic, social and cultural questions and initiate legislation, in other words, to submit proposals involving decision-making. Their opinions were given a great importance in finalising any policy for the country. Some of the functions previously exercised by state agencies were now carried out by public organisations. Khrushchev said : "Many functions hitherto carried out by

state organs must gradually pass into the hands of public organisations. They can perfectly be run by public organisations. And the transfer of certain functions of state bodies to public organisations should be carried out without haste. The implementation by public organisations, of a number of functions which now appertain to the state will broaden and strengthen the political foundations of the socialist democracy!"¹⁷

All social insurance matters, health resort services, rest homes, and physical culture and sports all these functions were handed over to Trade Unions. Entertainment, libraries, clubs and other cultural establishments began to be administered by public organisations. People's control committees which were suspended in the Stalin period, were also re-introduced. These agencies encompassed millions of volunteer public inspectors, who assisted in monitoring the performance of workers and management in enterprises and farms across the country, in ministries, in construction, in transport and communications, in consumer services, and in health, educational and military

17. Edward Crankshaw, Khrushchev's Russia (Australia, 1959) p. 94.

establishments.¹⁸ They operated both internally and externally in monitoring the efficiency and regularity of the state administrative apparatus and frequently influenced policy decisions at all levels of the Soviet political system. In these ways, a new form of self-government was established in the Soviet political system.

Khrushchev encouraged people, the rank and file, to participate in the running of the country with the help of public organisations and by re-establishing People's Control Committees. For a Russian ruler to invite the people to take a direct and active share, even though the Party remains sovereign, was something new and important in itself.

Public opinion polls - a method of a democratic dialogue between the bodies of state authority and public opinion as an institution of direct democracy and the exponent of what the people think and want, were also introduced for the first time in the 1960s which represented

18. Jan S. Adams, Citizen Inspector in the Soviet Union: The People's Control Committee (New York, London, 1977) P. 1.

one of the most striking departures from the climate of Stalinism and gave an official recognition to public opinion. It showed the desire of post-Stalin leaders to understand their society better and thereby reduce their need to rely upon coercion. Public opinion polls were seen by leadership as an effective form of gathering information needed in order to achieve greater efficiency, to combat apathy and instil a higher sense of participation among various strata of the population. They were regarded as a significant step towards taking popular wishes into account in the formulation of policies.

This mechanism of opinion polls and inquiries really opened up fresh possibilities for further drawing the working people into administering the affairs of the society. By his appraisal of the political, socio-economic and cultural programmes put forward by the Party and the State, by his proposals or rejection of certain items on these programmes the ordinary Soviet man realized that his views were taken into account in the final elaboration and definition of Party and state documents.

Although first, amateurish but widely publicized poll

on basic question - " Will mankind succeed in averting war ? " evoked some extremely negative reactions, simply because it indicated such a shift from the practice of so many years. ¹⁹ From 60s public opinion polls on different questions became more regular. The Public opinion Institute of Komsomol'skai Pravda (Komsomol's newspaper) was established and first youth poll with a 12 item questionnaire on 6 January 1961, was administered by it under the rubric ' What do you think of your generation ? ' The result of the poll were viewed, with pride, as Soviet youth's endorsement of itself. Of the 17,446 respondents, 83.4 per cent replied that they were pleased with their generation, 11.1 per cent that they were not, and 5.5 per cent could give no definite answer. ²⁰ Such, then was the result of the first youth poll.

One interesting poll was conducted among Leningrad youth, emphasising young workers, in 1963-64 with the

19. Walter D. Conner, Zvi y. Gitelman and others, Public opinion in European Socialist Systems (New York, London, 1977), p. 107.

20. Ibid., p. 111

question. " Do you participate in public work" ? ²¹

The results were as under:

Table 2 - Question: " Do you participate in public work"?

Participation in Public work	Amount	Per cent
Yes	952	(46.7)
No	365	(18.1)
Would like to but have not been asked	539	(26.4)
No answer	179	(8.8)

Source : S.N. Ikonnikova and V.T. Lisovskii, *Molodezh: O Sebe, O Svoikh Sverstnikakh* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1969) p. 59.

In 1963-64 poll was conducted on the question of youth pleasure or displeasure with their generation. Of 2,035 asked, 86.4 per cent replied that they were pleased, 12.5 per cent indicated displeasure, and 1.7 per cent gave no answer. ²² In 1961, a study was conducted on attitudes and ideas about the "movement for Communist labour" ²³ Polls on other areas of public opinion research

21. Ibid., p. 120.

22. Ibid., p. 114

23. Ibid., p. 122.

such as leisure time, marriage and responses to the press by readers, were conducted.²⁴

Freedom of speech, which is a barometer of public opinion, without which there can be no public opinion, did not remain on paper but was carried out in practice in the post-Stalin period. People were encouraged not only to speak freely but also to exercise their right to criticise. It was regarded a major principle of socialist democracy through which they could express their opinions about shortcomings in social life and in the work of Party and state bodies. Khrushchev gave the call for criticism from below. He often called upon the masses to criticise their hierarchical superiors, promising them political support if they did so. "If your leaders are bad, it is your own fault. You pester your leaders very little; you don't demand that they work well,"²⁵ said Khrushchev.

Thus people were encouraged to express their views and criticism. Criticism of the management of workers

24. Ibid. p. 124

25. George W. Breslawer, no.3, p. 44.

became a regular practice. This right of expression and criticism was not confined to oral communications but extended to written complaints as well. Now people were free to write letters of complaints or proposals to Party or state organisations or the press. From about 1960s increasing emphasis was given to work with letters.

Table - 3. Letters to Soviet Newspapers 1955-60

Year	Pravda	Izvestia	Trud
1955	250,000	46,974	n.a
1960	299,000	211,000	209,160

Source:- White (Stephen), "Political Communication in the USSR: Letter to Party, State and Press". Political Studies, 1983, Vol 31, no.1, p. 52.

Thus a number of letters of complaints or suggestions were received by Soviet newspapers in the Khrushchev period and this means for the expression of public opinion was reactivated.

The press and other mass media, mouthpieces for public opinion, which have the functions of discovering and expressing views, opinions and informations and shaping public opinion, were more and more liberalised

in the post-Stalin period. These institutions of protecting people's right to criticism and freedom of speech and making one's opinion known, which were completely under Party control in the Stalin period, were given full freedom to write and propagate freely. Soviet people themselves started participating in the work of newspapers, magazines and T.V. broadcasting. According to Control Committee resolution of 28 June, 1960, more than 5,000,000 Soviet workers, collective farmers and representatives of the intelligentsia voluntarily participated in the work of newspapers, magazines, and also in radio and television broadcasting. Soviet newspapers were free to publish critical remarks or letters sent by Soviet people on the shortcomings of officials. Every Soviet newspaper had a daily column which went under such heading as "Letters From Our Readers", "Replies" etc. Writers, who had been striving for greater freedom of expression for nearly a decade were provided freedom to write on a subject of their own choice and to handle it in accordance with their own vision of reality in a form congenial to their vision.

Other mass media like T.V. and Radio which are also

powerful means of moulding public opinion and giving all-round expression to the views and feelings of the Soviet people, were also given freedom to expose shortcomings and bottlenecks in different areas of life. Thus, there were substantial changes in the tone and tenour of the mass media in the post-Stalin period. They were no longer just a tool for manipulating the public mind.

Thus we find that in the post-Stalin period there were great changes in the Soviet society. The relationship between the rulers and the ruled changed as against Stalin's time when leadership kept itself in isolation from the people. The entire life of society was based on the principle of broad democracy - Socialist democracy including freedom - freedom of speech, of the press and of the assembly. People were encouraged to participate in administration to relieve the strain on officials as well as to increase pressure on officials so that they could better carry out their policies. It was visualised by the new leadership that it was impossible to fulfil the goal of developed socialism without a broadmass participation in the administration and expression of their opinions and without taking into account the criticism voiced by citizens on a wide variety of questions

ranging from minor issues to matters of state importance. There was free flow of public expression and it was taken into consideration of every step. Khrushchev himself, unlike Stalin, went to most of the Republics of the Soviet Union, met and talked with people and heard their opinion.

CHAPTER - IV

CONSULTATION OF PUBLIC OPINION AND ITS EXTENSION IN
1977 CONSTITUTION.

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The socialist democracy re-established in the Khrushchev period was not only consolidated during the subsequent period but important steps were taken to enhance its role in Soviet society. Brezhnev, who succeeded Khrushchev as the First Secretary of the Party (later designating himself as General Secretary) devoted much attention to the development of socialist democracy. He said : " for us democracy is boon, it is an essential condition for all our activities".¹ He also said on 25th Congress of CPSU in 1976 : "Today, we know not only from theory but from years of practice that real democracy is impossible without socialism, and that socialism is impossible without the constant development of democracy"² He had stated, that we understand the improvement of our socialist democracy, above all, is as the continuously increasing involvement of the working people in managing all the affairs of society,

1. L.I. Brezhnev, " Questions of Development of the Political System of Soviet Society (Moscow, 1977),
p. 61.

2. Documents and Resolutions. XXVth Congress of the CPSU,
Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, Moscow, 1976,
p. 103.

as the further development of the democratic foundation of our statehood.

Brezhnev tried to improve people's participation in the management^a of state affairs and took their opinions into account on every policy before their consideration by the Supreme Soviet. Brezhnev made the following statement at the 16th Congress of the Soviet Trade Unions: " It is only when the working man knows that his opinion is being heeded, and his attitude taken into account when drafting social and economic plans, that he feels he is real master of his factory and architect of his destiny".³ Public opinion institutions were also established in a great number to gauge public opinion. Public opinion was proclaimed to be an instrument of social management. In the 25th Party Congress Brezhnev emphasised the importance and necessity of mansided and planned study of public opinion. In his report he said: " the study of public opinion deserves greater attention".⁴

3. L.I. Brezhnev, no.1, p. 408.

4. R.A. Safarov, " Problems of Public Opinion Research" Soviet Law and Government(New York), Vol. 16, no.3, P. 59

Polls were conducted frequently on various problems of society. Public discussions of draft laws(bills), economic plans and other measures became quite regular and widespread during the Brezhnev period. To give some examples, Fundamentals of Legislation On Marriage and the Family (1968), Public Health (1969) Labour (1970) Land(1968), Water Resources(1970) Education(1973), Mineral Resources(1975), Protection of Historical and Cultural Monuments(1976) and a number of other drafts. In this way, the democratic system and the tradition of studying public opinion were taken over from the Khrushchev period and every attempt was made to increase the role of public opinion in the Soviet political system.

The 1977 Constitution may be regarded as the best example of the increased insistence on study of public opinion in connection with the nationwide discussion of its draft. The long-awaited new Constitution, which Khrushchev had first promised in 1961, was published on 4 June 1977 and submitted to nationwide discussion.

Speaking at the May 1977 Plenary meeting of the CPSU

Central Committee. L. Brezhnev said: " The task before us is to ensure the widest possible, free and genuinely business-like discussion of the Draft Constitution, to draw the mass of the working people, representatives of all sections of the population, into this discussion and to use for these purposes our established forms of public activity." ⁵ He observed that the important thing was to set up an accurate mechanism for taking into consideration workers suggestions and proposals made through various channels. He also remarked that the party organisations and organs were under an obligation not only to develop the discussion of the constitution on a broad base but also to give it " a clear and precise political direction". ⁶

Thus, right after the circulation of the Draft of the New Soviet Constitution, a heated and interesting discussion began all over the country. Soviet people took an active part in this discussion of the draft of the New Fundamental Law. Never before had the country known

5. Y. Ageshin, " The Constitution of the Developed Socialism". International Affairs (Moscow), no.12, Dec. 1977. p. 77

6. Eberhard Schneider, " The Discussion of the New All - Union Constitution in the USSR, " Soviet Studies. Vol.31. no.4. Oct. 1979. p. 523

such active participation by the public on such a large scale. Everywhere conditions were provided for the broadest nation-wide discussion of the Draft. Every citizen had a chance to express his opinion, make proposals and remarks. The Constitutional Commission in reporting on the nationwide discussion of the Draft to the Supreme Soviet, cited the following facts : 140,000,000 citizens, 80 per cent of the adult population participated in the discussion; 1,500,000 meetings of the working people were held in the factories, farms, residential areas, Trade Unions and elsewhere to discuss the draft, including 450,000 Communist Party meetings. Over four hundred thousand written discussion pieces, letters and proposals concerning the Draft were received. ⁷

The discussion took place over a period of nearly 4 months and was nation-wide in true sense of the world. Millions upon millions of working people in town and country checked every line in the draft against their own practical work, against the work of their work collectives.

7. Howard L. Parsons, " On the New Constitution of the USSR", Political Affairs (New York), Vol. 56, no.11, Nov. 1977, p.7

There was an unending flow of letters from the Soviet people, Party members or not, and all of them, as masters of the country, thoroughly examined the draft constitution, making proposals for improving the text and expressing other considerations bearing on various aspects of life in socialist society.

These letters, proposals, and remarks were carefully studied and scrutinized by the Constitutional Commission. Such statements and letters reflected the emergence of a new man who was not separate from the state and who regarded the interests of the state his own vital concern. As a result of thorough - going study of all the suggestions and remarks made in the course of the nation-wide discussion 110 Articles out of 173 of the Draft were amended and a completely new article was added.⁸ Brezhnev reported that the discussion " had made it possible markedly to improve the draft constitution and to write into it a number of useful additions, clarifications or amendments".⁹

8. Mikhail Taratuta, Soviet Democracy : A Discussion (Moscow, 1985), p. 93.

9. Howard L. Parsons, no.7.

Brezhnev was thus close to reality in claiming that the discussion had in fact transcended the "framework of an analysis of the text". It had developed into a frank commentary truly by the whole people on the key aspects of our life.¹⁰ He emphasized in his report to the 7th Extraordinary Session of the USSR Supreme Soviet, " It is the whole Soviet people who have in fact become the true creators of the Fundamental Law of their state".¹¹

So, the Fundamental Law of the USSR, put for nationwide discussion, drawn on the collective wisdom of the people, reflected its sovereign will and the most cherished aspirations and interests. It highlighted the historical advantages of Soviet democracy. This nationwide discussion asserted the fact that the Soviet people themselves voiced their feelings - " yes, this is the Fundamental Law we looked forward to. It truly reflected our gains and our aspirations and hopes, and correctly defines our rights and duties - while formalizing what has been achieved, it opens up proposals for further advance in the building of Communism."¹² As such, the

10. R.R. Sharma, " Some Parameters of the New Soviet Constitution". International Studies, vol,18no.2 April-June 1979, p.211.

11. Y. Agheshin, no.5.

12. L.I. Brezhnev, Socialism, Democracy and Human Rights (Oxford, 1980) P. 172.

discussion on the draft of the New Constitution by the entire people was a new testimony to the democratic character of the Soviet state system. It formalized the advancement of democracy, in other words, the promotion of broader participation of working people in running the affairs of the state and society and closer consideration of public opinion.

Public opinion was not only consulted on the draft of the New Constitution but it was given official recognition by the New Fundamental Law. It extended its scope by adding several new Articles. This nationwide discussion made it possible to improve a number of provisions in the draft aimed at the further development of socialist democracy. Article 9 of the 1977 Constitution was a great step toward extending socialist democracy. It declared that the principal line of development of the political system of Soviet society was " the extension of socialist democracy, that is, ever broader participation of citizens in managing the affairs of society and the state, continuous improvement of the machinery of state, heightening of the activity of public organisations, strengthening of the system of people's control, consolidation of the legal foundations of the functioning of the state and of public life, greater

openness and publicity, and constant responsiveness to public opinion".¹³ In Article 9 broader democracy and public opinion as a principal direction of the Soviet political system were given official recognition.

The draft of the Constitution emphasised that the power belonging to Soviet people is to be exercised not only through representative organs - the Soviets - but also directly, through immediate expression of the popular will. A new article, Article 5 gave place to such a form of direct democracy. Nationwide discussion and popular vote, were added in the 1977 Constitution by it. Article 5 says : " Major matters of state shall be submitted to nationwide discussion and put to a popular vote (referendum.)"¹⁴

For the first time it was provided that bills and other important matters in political affairs would be submitted for nationwide discussion by the entire people

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13. T.M. Dzhafarli, " The Study of Public Opinion, A necessary condition for adoption of Correct Discussions", Soviet Law and Government, vol. 17, no.3, Winter 1978-79, p. 10
14. Boris Topornin, The New Constitution of the USSR (Moscow, 1980)p. 238.

or put before them for voting (referendum), thus increasing the role of public opinion. Obviously the submission of all major legislative questions for public discussion implemented the policy-making role of public opinion. In this way, representative democracy was transformed into direct democracy.

The new Constitution re-affirms freedom of speech, of the press, and of assembly, meeting, street processions and demonstrations contained in the previous constitution. But to these Constitutional guarantees of the rights of the individual an important addition was made by the right of citizens to submit proposals to state bodies and public organisations, criticising shortcomings in their work and for improving their activities. To guarantee this right, the new Constitution makes it mandatory for officials to examine citizens' proposals and requests, to reply to them, and to take appropriate action - all within established time-limits. Persecution for making criticism has been made a punishable offence. As Article 49 says -

"Every citizen of the USSR has the right to submit proposals to state bodies and public organisations for improving their activity, and to criticise shortcomings in their work.

Officials are obliged, within established time-limits, to examine citizens' proposals and requests, to reply to them

and to take appropriate action. Persecution for criticism is prohibited. Persons guilty of such persecution shall be called to account." 15

This new Constitutional right, the right to criticise implied freedom of the citizens to express their opinions and convictions. This right to criticise was made more meaningful by forbidding any persecution for criticism and by making obligatory for all Soviet government, party and public bodies and organisations to heed to the working people's letters complaints and suggestions within the prescribed time.

A new article, Article 57 was included in the new Constitution providing the Soviet citizens the right to legal protection, i.e., protection by the courts against any encroachments upon life and health, property, personal freedom, honour and dignity. As Article 57 states:

" Respect for the individual and protection of the rights and freedoms of citizens are the duty of all state bodies, public organisations, and officials". 16

15. Ibid., pp. 253-254.

16. Ibid., p. 255.

In this way, by including this new article citizens' rights and freedom were guaranteed and protected through the activities of state organs, public organisations and officials. This article elaborated on the Constitution's basic premise that the whole political machinery is oriented on the interests of the individual. Another new article 58 was also added in the 1977 Constitution which likewise extended the role of public opinion. Article 58 says:

" Citizens of the USSR have the right to lodge a complaint against the actions of officials, state bodies and public bodies. Complaints shall be examined according to the procedure and within the time limit established by law.

Actions by officials that contravene the law or exceed their powers, and infringe the rights of citizens, may be appealed against in a court in the manner prescribed by law.

Citizens of the USSR have the right to compensation for damage resulting from unlawful actions by state organisations and public organisations, or by officials in the performance of their duties". 17

17. Ibid., pp. 255-256.

By adding this new article Soviet citizens are provided the right to lodge complaints in a court of law against the unlawful actions of officials, state bodies and public bodies and also to indemnification for damages incurred by such unlawful actions. In accordance with the established procedure people's complaints are considered by ministers, the executive committees of local Soviets, their departments and administrations, by the administration of institutions, organisations and enterprises, and also by the court within the time limited by law. The Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, " On the Procedure of Examining Citizen's Applications and Complaints defines the maximum time-limits for such examination by all government bodies: normally they are up to 15 days or when additional study or inspection is required, up to one month. ¹⁸

Besides introducing some new articles, extending the role of public opinion, some articles were amended to enhance the role of democracy and public opinion.

18. Ibid., p. 137.

The 1977 Constitution increased the role and importance of public organisations such as - Trade Unions, Komsomols, etc. which are the main channels for the expression of public will and opinion. In the new Constitution of 1977 mass organisations are ensured the right to participate in deciding political, economic, social and cultural questions and to initiate legislation represented by their all - Union organs. The 1936 Constitution of the USSR only proclaimed the citizen's right to unite into public organisations.

Article 7 of the new Constitution treats these organisations as part and parcel - an important link of the political system. This article provides for Trade-Unions, the Komsomol, Cooperatives, and other public organisations to participate in managing the state and public affairs, and in deciding political, economic, social and cultural matters in accordance with the aims laid down in their rules. It states:

" Trade Union, the All Union Leninist Young Communist League, Co-operatives, and other public organisations, participate in accordance with the aims laid down in their rules, in managing state and public affairs, and in deciding political economic, and social and cultural matters". 19

19. Devendra Kaushik, . Soviet Political System: Perceptions and Perspectives. (Moscow, 1983)pp.119-120

Under Article 113 they have been authorised to propose legislation. Article 113 states:

" The right to initiate legislation is also vested in public organisations through their All - Union bodies".²⁰

An important amendment to provision in the Constitution relating to public organisations which was made on the basis of the proposals and remarks of the people, pertains to the elaboration of provisions on labour collectives. A new article devoted to them has now been included in Chapter I as Article 8 which emphasises the fact that the party regards work collectives not only as economic entities but also as a socio-political cell of society, a key element of the political system. It states:-

"Work collectives take part in discussing, and deciding state and public affairs, in planning production and social development, in training and placing personnel, and in discussing and deciding matters pertaining to the management of enterprises and institutions, the improvement of working and living conditions, and the use of funds allocated both for developing production and for social and

20. Boris Topornin, n. 14, p. 273

cultural purposes and financial incentives.

Work Collectives promote socialist emulation, the spread of progressive methods of work, and the strengthening of production discipline, educate their members in the spirit of Communist morality, and strive to enhance their political consciousness and raise their cultural level and skills and qualifications". 21

In this way, in the new Constitution the rights of public organisations were widened and their influence in the formulation and execution of national policies was increased. It reflected the growing role of the public and of public opinion.

In addition to it, concerning electors' mandates, a relevant Article had been included in the 1977 Constitution (Article 102), following the numerous proposals made during the nationwide discussion of its draft. This Article 102 states:-

"Electors give mandate to their deputies.

The appropriate Soviets of People's Deputies shall examine electors' mandates, take them into account in

21. Ibid., pp. 238-239.

drafting economic and social development plans and in drawing up the budget, organise implementation of the mandates, and inform citizens about it".²²

By this article implementation of mandates, is made the direct duty of the Deputies to whom they are addressed. The Constitution contains a provision that the Soviets must devote priority attention to electors' mandates. They should examine them, take them into account in drafting economic and social development plans. A special point is made that population must be kept constantly informed about the handling of mandates. As a result of this undoubtedly role of public opinion has been enhanced.

In this way, we find that the essence of the new Constitution is its care for the people. Never before have such public discussions taken place in the Soviet political system, never before have such slogans of the popular revolutionary movement as democracy and freedom been used as in the new Constitution. It provides a more

22. Ibid., p. 268.

complete definition of the social, economic, political cultural and personal rights and freedoms of Soviet citizens. Not only this, the new Constitution also added some new articles enlarging the people's participatory rights, intended to ensure a more meaningful scope for mass involment in political life.

All this marked a new stage in the development of socialist democracy and scope of public opinion. As Brezhnev said in his report of the May Plenary Meeting of the CPSU Central Committee : " Generally speaking the main aim of the innovations in the Draft is to broaden and deepen socialist democracy". ²³

The new Constitution of the USSR once again proved with particular force that Socialist society is a society of working people for working people, and that socialist democracy is a democracy of the people and for the people. It not only involved the people in its discussion, but added some new provisions extending people's role in Soviet life.

23. V. Dolgin, " A Society of Truely People's Power". International Affairs. Aug. 1977, p. 5.

To sum up, the 1977 Constitution may be described as one of the best examples of giving Constitutional recognition to public opinion. It not only consulted public opinion on its Draft, but by including some new articles and amending some previous ones extended the scope of public opinion, giving an official recognition to it.

CHAPTER - V

PUBLIC OPINION AND STATE AND PARTY ORGANISATIONS

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PUBLIC OPINION AND STATE AND PARTY ORGANISATIONS

Public opinion in the Soviet Union is the most important form of real democracy which presupposes an active and direct participation of the people in governing the political, economic and social processes. It plays an increasingly greater role in solving the problems facing socialist society and expresses the democratic nature of the Soviet State.

Soviet state organizations - Soviets of People's Deputies - and the Communist Party are regarded as the Chief Channels of expressing public opinion in the Soviet political system. It goes without saying that the Soviet state and the Communist Party have always devised effective methods for studying the public opinion and taking due account of it. These methods serve as a sensitive barometer making known the interests of the mass of the working people.

The state organizations of power - Soviets of People's Deputies - are considered the best organs for effectively expressing social aspirations, opinions and moods of the

the masses as they were spontaneous creation of the masses themselves. Since its inception they are considered to be based on the masses. As Lenin hailed them, " An authority open to all, it carries out all its functions before the eyes of the masses, springs directly from masses and is a direct and immediate instrument of the popular masses, of their will".¹

Soviets are an instrument of drawing the whole of the people into the practical work of the administration. A type of organisation through which the mass of the workers can participate directly in political life, they are formed from the representatives of the working people freely elected and replaceable at any time by the masses. People directly elect deputies of Soviets at all levels. This presents an excellent occasion for the most extensive expression of public opinion in the Soviet political process. It presents a means for drawing broad sections of the people into political activity. Elections of deputies give chance to the people to voice their opinions.

1. V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, Vol.10, P. 245

People actively participate in elections. They do not merely participate but manage the elections from beginning to end themselves. People nominate candidates for Soviet through public organisations at general meetings that hold discussions on several candidates. This enables every citizen to express his views and allow party and local government bodies to be better aware of the sentiments and will of the people. Election preparation and elections themselves, organisation of voting and counting of votes are the functions of working people themselves. Election Commissions appointed for elections involve millions of citizens.

In local Soviets more effective participation of the masses in the actual work of the government is ensured. They involve ordinary citizens more directly. They are more close to the people. For example, there are numerous election meetings at which the electors can meet the candidates. This is not always possible in republic and Supreme Soviet elections. Local elections give voters the chance to bargain with local officials over minor matters in so far as small favours may be exchanged for votes. Local issues can be, and often are, important in local

elections, but less so in other governmental elections.

Soviet people not only elect their deputies, but they themselves directly participate in the state affairs. There are voluntary organisations (called aktiv) of people at local level which are engaged as voluntary workers in various Standing Commissions and Committees of local Soviets - which is a good example of self-administration. The same practice operates at the level of the Supreme Soviets also. There are now over 2,240,000 such organisations in the country, involving 31,000,000 people. In local Soviets around 25-30 million persons are directly involved. These activists participate in sessions of the Soviets, in sittings of the executive committees and in the standing commissions. They take an active part in the discussion of the report of the People's Deputies and the heads of the organs of state power. This involvement of ordinary citizens in the actual work of government enlists not only their physical power but their criticism and suggestion. In this way, people daily participate in the state affairs.

Besides electing deputies for Soviets, people have the right to recall them if they have not justified their trust.

A deputy can be recalled at anytime by a majority decision of his constituents if he has forfeited their confidence. In 1959 a statute was passed dealing with recall., It served as a model for similar legislation in the various Union Republics. This right to recall exists just not on paper. The use of it is said to run to 600-700 cases per year. A total of 8,000 deputies to the local Soviets were recalled during the 1959-81 period. And more than 100 deputies to the Supreme Soviets of the Union and Autonomous Republics and 12 Deputies to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR were also recalled during the same period.² In 1961 alone 33 local deputies in Kazakhstan were recalled.

Electorates give their mandates to the deputies of all Soviets from highest to the lowest level. These mandates are in the form of suggestions made by the majority of the residents in a given constituency. The formulation of mandates and their adoption increases the scope of popular initiative and ensures the active participation of the people in the affairs of the Soviets. Deputies

2. Devendra Kaushik, Soviet Political System : Perceptions and Perspectives. (Moscow, 1983), p.64

have to keep elector's - mandate in mind while drafting economic and social development plans.

Thus deputies elected by people at all levels are not free from accountability to the voters after their election. They are bound by their instructions. They have to report regularly to their electors about their activities. The law also stipulates that Deputies of the Supreme Soviet must report at least once a year and the Deputies of the local Soviets at least twice a year to their electorate.³ Thus, masses increasingly control the work of the deputies in the bodies of state power, both central and local. The deputies elected by them express the will and interests of the people. They receive visitors regularly, listen to their complaints and study public opinion. They have sound knowledge of it and elector's - interests and requirements are taken into account when decisions are made.

Not only this, people criticise Soviet's activities

3. Boris Topornin, The New Constitution of the USSR.
(Moscow, 1980), P. 185

by writing them letters which strengthen and broaden the link between Soviets and the people and ensure the participation of the population in the Conduct of state. In their turn, the Soviets also encourage work with letters. In 1967 the first comprehensive all-union legal provision was made in a decree of the presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet entitled. " On the procedure for the consideration of proposals, declarations and complaints of citizens", which was adopted on 12 April, 1968. The decree laid down a standard procedure for dealing with the oral and written communications of citizens, establishing in every case which body should deal with the communication in question and within what period of time, and including a right of appeal to a higher instance if necessary. A decree was adopted on the same date establishing procedures for the consideration of letters by deputies to the USSR Supreme Soviet.⁴

The new Constitution of 1977 by introducing two new articles, Article 49 and Article 58 gave official recognition

4. Stephen White, "Political Communications in the USSR: Letters to Party, State and Press", Political Studies, Vol.31, no.1, March 1983, p. 45.

to citizen's rights to submit letters and criticism to state organisations and obligation of officials to respond to them within specific time limits. The decree of Presidium of USSR Supreme Soviet of 1968 was revised and expanded, strengthening both of these rights. " The decree on the consideration of the proposals, declarations and complaints of citizens now refers specifically to the right of citizens to 'criticise shortcomings' in the work of state bodies and to 'lodge complaints against the actions of officials and state bodies'." ⁵

Soviets at all levels get a number of letters by people criticising shortcomings and sending proposals. During the discussion of the new constitution in 1977, for instance, over 180,000 letters were addressed to the Constitutional Commission, to local state bodies and to the press, and over 20,000 letters were sent directly to the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet. ⁶ Soviets get

5. Ibid., p. 46.

6. Ibid., p. 49.

number of letters by people commenting on policies for which they are directly responsible.

In this way, the Soviets, the main institutions of state administration in the country set up by the people, consist of representatives of the people who are accountable to and subject to control by the people, which means that they are organs of popular power in every respect and in the full sense of the word. Public opinion is fully reflected in them. They carry on their activities in full public view and with the participation of general public. Government officials who by virtue of their office are constantly in contact with the population are also convinced of the need of studying public opinion. One question put to the employees of the local Soviets in the Kalinin Region (Centre of the European part of the USSR) was "Do you believe that the study of public opinion is an important duty of the Executive Committees of the Soviets of People's Deputies ? 92.5 per cent of the answers were in the affirmative, 2.6 per cent in the negative, 3.6 per cent wrote "Don't Know" and 1.3 per cent gave no answer".⁷

7. R. Safarov, "Public opinion Under Developed Socialism" Socialism: Theory and Practice (Moscow), no.2, Feb. 1978, p. 84.

So, Soviets are the organisations which embrace all the workers, peasants, soliders, intelligentsia and all nations and nationalities of the country and express their opinions, will and interests.

In addition to the Soviets of People's Deputies, Communist Party of the Soviet Union is also the prominent barometer expressing public opinion, exponent and mainstay of socialist democracy. Since its birth Lenin did his utmost to make it a mass party in the full sense of the word. Lenin observed: " we can administer only when we express correctly what the people are conscious of. Unless we do this, the Communist Party will not lead the proletariat, the proletariat will not lead the masses".⁸ Lenin saw the necessary condition for the party's success in its ability to link up with the broadest masses of the working people, to carry on all its activities among the masses, and to win the confidence and support of the broad masses and not to lag behind them. Thus, throughout its history (with the exception of cult period) the CPSU has always worked among the people.

8. V.I. Lenin, no.1, Vol.33, p. 304

Pursuing the Leninist course, CPSU considers the study of public opinion as of great significance. It creates the necessary conditions for probing and monitoring public opinion through carefully conducted research. It always attaches primary importance to the strengthening of its ties with the masses. It always strives to correctly express the vital interests and needs of the working masses winning them over to its side. It has shown concern to broaden the participation of the working people in running the affairs of society and state and to create conditions for all-round flourishing of the individual. As Article 6 of the Constitution also declares: "The CPSU exists for the people and serves the people."⁹

Since its inception, the Party has been built at the different levels of the political system. Today the CPSU consists of 14 Communist Parties of Union Republics, 6 territorial, 148 regional, 10 area and more than 4,000 town and district organisations, as well as of 390,000

9. M.A. Krutogolov, Talks on Soviet Democracy
(Moscow, 1980), p. 34

primary organisations. ¹⁰ Primary organisations function in the midst of the masses, are in constant contact with them, rally them around the party, express their interests in party policy and carry this policy into effect. Party membership is open to any citizen. It is increasing every year since 1905 when it had a membership of just 8,400. Now with over 19 million members it has really become a mass political organisation through which people directly participate in the administration of the country.

Millions of Communist Party members, being representative of the various social segments of the Soviet people, express their will and interests, as they are sufficiently well-informed of the needs and aspirations of the different population groups in which they live and work. Therefore, this mass-based party, truly of the people, flexibly responds to the needs and moods of the working people and adequately reflects their interests.

Major party issues are widely discussed by party members

10. Boris Topornin, no.3, pp. 60-61.

as Lenin first stressed that public opinion should be taken within the party above all on certain aspects of politics. The Rules of the party also state - "The supreme principle of party leadership is collective leadership, which is an absolute requisite for the normal functioning of Party organisations The cult of the individual and the violations of inner-party democracy resulting from it must not be tolerated in the party ; they are incompatible with the Leninist principles of Party life".¹¹ The party members are free to "discuss freely questions of Party policy and activities of Party meetings, Conferences and Congresses etc."¹² They are free "to criticise any Communist, irrespective of the position he holds, at party meetings, Conferences, Congresses, at meetings of Party Committees and in the Party press; to table motions; openly to express and uphold opinions as long as the Party organisation concerned has not adopted a decision".¹³

11. Cited by L.G. Churchward, Contemporary Soviet Government, Second edition, (London and Henley, 1975), p. 206.

12. Ibid.,

13. Ibid., p. 207.

Since 1952 to develop criticism and self-criticism has become the duty of party members. Persons holding minority views are not bound by Committee decisions in a discussion on such decisions in a members' meeting but are permitted to express minority views and even to put motions in opposition to those of the Committee.¹⁴ Thus, party members are free to express opinion and their opinions are taken into account while party policies are made.

Besides taking cognizance of public opinion inside the Party, the Party puts all its policies for public discussion. The Party Programme says - "The Party considers it its duty always to consult the working people on the major questions of home and foreign policy, to make these questions an object of nationwide discussion, and to attract more non-members to participating in all its works".¹⁵

Such public discussions on party policy serve to rally mass support for newly formulated party policy. They also provide criticism of the detail of central policy and allow

14. Ibid., p. 208.

15. M.A. Krutogolov, no.9, p. 38.

for its modification before adoption. There has been a number of public discussions on party policies in a span of time. For example, during 1956 discussion on the Pension Law, during the 1957 discussion on industrial reorganisation, and during the 1958 discussion on the Education Act, etc. ¹⁶

There has been nation-wide discussion on party's five year plans. Party's programmatic documents of the Guidelines for the USSR's Economic and Social Development from 1981 to 1985 and for the period until 1990, was widely discussed in all regions, territories and union republics of the country, and by all work collectives.¹⁷ Ten million people took part in the discussion and 1.2 million proposals were submitted. All of them were examined and taken into account in elaborating the five year plan for 1981-85. Similarly, the 1977 Constitution as already noted was also put for public discussion. It was another powerful demonstration of the Party's close unity with the people. All this shows that the CPSU always takes this approach when decisions

16. L.G. Churchward, no.11, p. 270.

17. Viktor Grishin - "Party Policy and Mass Creativity". Problems of Peace and Socialism(New Delhi), Vol.10, no.5, May 1982, p.7.

relating to the fundamental vital interests of the country's entire population are to be made.

In this way, we find that the work of the Party organisations is completely open. The Soviet people are not only widely informed of the work of the Party through the media and meetings, but they themselves actively participate in the formulation and implementation of party policies. All this proves the tremendous role of the masses in the process in which the Party's policy is shaped as a people's policy, meeting the vital interests and aspirations of the working people.

Besides public discussion, the Party encourages people to lodge written complaints and suggestions for its activities and policies. Since the 60s letters from the people to Party organs, which are one of the main forms of strengthening and broadening the link between the Party and people, a means for the expression of public opinion, sources of information about the people's interests and requirements, are being given great importance by the Party. The Party is openly inviting people to write letters to Party bodies complaining and making

suggestions for improvement and formulation of policies. Work with letters is being given great importance.

A decree on it was first adopted, " On the improvement of work on the consideration of letters and the organisation of the reception of toilers", by the Central Committee on 29 August 1967.¹⁸ This was revised in 1976. Later the 1977 constitution by adding two new articles, people's right to write letters to officials and their consideration within limited time, gave legal recognition to public opinion.

The receipt and consideration of letters from the public takes place at all levels of the Party. The number of letters have grown from year to year. For example - nearly two million letters were received by the Central Committee between the 24th and 25th Congresses of the CPSU. In 1978 alone, over 700,000 letters were received. Around two million letters were received that year by the Central Committee of the Communist Parties of the Union Republics and by the territorial, regional

18. Stephen White, no.4.

and other party Committees. New Constitution is a good example of receiving letters of proposals and complaints from the people.

The table below shows the sharp increase in the citizens' letters to Party Bodies in the year 1971-1980

Table-1 : Citizens' Letters to Party Bodies 1971-1980

(A) Letters to Central and Local Party Bodies	No of Letters
Received by the Central Committee between the 24th and 25th Party Congresses(1971-75)	2,008,000
Received by the Central Committee between the 25th and 26th Party Congresses(1976-80)	3,152,000
Received by the Central Committee in 1975 (before the 25th Party Congress)	430,000
Received by the Central Committee in 1980 (before the 26th Party Congress)	671,000
Received by republican, territorial, regional, <u>okrug</u> , town and district party committees between the 25th and 26th Party Congresses (1976-80)	9,000,000
Received by republican, etc. party committees in 1980(before the 26th Party Congress)	1,800,000

(B) Letters to the CPSU Central Committee.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Letters</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Letters</u>
1971	482,100	1976	693,260
1972	352,500	1977	657,360
1973	368,680	1978	558,740
1974	374,060	1979	570,880
1975	429,960	1980	671,600

Source :- Spravochnik Partinogo rabotvika, Vyp. 21 (Moscow 1981) pp. 503-504

In 1978-79 a Letters' Department was also formed in the Central Committee Secretariat to analyze the mail systematically and completely and to help other Party Committees to improve their work in this area, which receives on an average about 1,500 letters everyday.

Thus the Communist Party organisation at all levels regard work with letters and requests from the people as a matter of great political importance. This is not because these letters are a source of information, an indication of the people's frame of mind, documents, testifying to their needs and requirements. But such letters have become one of the key forms of people's participation in discussing and solving major state and social problems, and infact, a form of citizens' participation in running the country.

Moreover, since the 1960s, Public Opinion Research Groups have also been formed by a number of all-level party organisations to conduct surveys, which is one of the indications of the maturity of socialist democracy. In 1964 the Social Sciences Academy of the Central Committee formed a group for the concrete sociological research on

methods of ideological work. In 1965 public opinion polls were conducted to study the influence of radio and television broadcast in Estonia. Similar polls were held in other Soviet cities as well.

At about the same time local party organisations also began to sponsor public opinion studies of their own. For example, a Council on the Study of Public Opinion at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia was established in 1975 as a sort of possible model. Public opinion surveys were frequently cited as an aid to policy-making by the reform-minded First Secretary of Georgia. It has conducted about 100 sociological polls among tens of thousands of workers and office employees, collective farmers, students, school children, pensioners and housewives. It has analysed thousands of citizens' letters to the Party and State bodies and the editorial offices of the mass media. In Moscow also district Party organisations have such Councils. In Leningrad, public opinion polls are being conducted since 1967, which is one of the important initiators of the systematic polling efforts in local party organisations.

A special group for analysing public opinion was set

up in 1979 at the CPSU Central Committee. It thoroughly studies letters sent in by working people, their comments and proposals on important programmes advanced by the Party in various spheres of life and analyses the results of public opinion polls.

In fact, there is considerable official encouragement of a more thorough study of public opinion. In April 1984 the largest most prestigious Conference on Public opinion ever held in the Soviet Union met in Tbilise, the capital of Georgia. From the above it is clear that public opinion constitutes today one of the main aspects of the work of the Communist Party as the guiding and directing force of Soviet society, striving to advance and extend socialist democracy. This shows the great efforts of the Party to take cognizance of public opinion as well as to take the people in confidence while deciding policies and seeking more rational ways of implementing it.

CHAPTER - VI

CONCLUSIONS

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CONCLUSION

Tsarist rule being a despotic one, there was no question of paying any heed to public opinion. Complete absence of democratic rights and freedoms of the people and total absence of democratic traditions gave no scope for formation of public opinion. After the victory of October Socialist Revolution which established the power of the people and created a new Soviet state, the people for the first time got a chance to express their opinion and influence the administration of the state affairs.

Lenin showed great concern for the masses. To him revolution was possible only when the masses were really conscious of its need and take active part in it. He gave full credit to the will and action of the masses for the victory of October Revolution. To conclude on the basis of Lenin's views about "pushing from without" the working class to transform its trade union consciousness to revolutionary consciousness that Lenin was in favour of an elitist leadership of professional revolutionaries coercing the masses, is to distort the Leninist teaching of the Communists' duty to convince the backward elements among the masses. The leadership was not only to teach the masses but also to learn from them. The

role of assigned to the leadership of professional revolutionaries by Lenin namely that of igniting their (the masses) revolutionary consciousness by providing a spark did not negate the importance of their role. The entire emphasis of Lenin was on persuading and convincing the masses. By his immense and manifold contribution to the development of direct democracy through the introduction of such institutions as the right to recall the elected representatives, referendum on important public issues and workers' control and the importance attached by him to work with letters from the public, Lenin elevated the role of public opinion to a new height.

During the period of Stalin this concern for public opinion receded into the background, even though adherence to the principle of free expression of public opinion continued to be formally reiterated in important state and Party documents. Stalin's personality cult concentrated all powers in the hands of a single all-powerful leader. The Party members were duty bound to defend and execute the decisions of the leadership. The government was subordinated to the Party leadership. It was citizens'

duty to approve the policies of the Party leadership, never questioning them. Stalin's rule was based on high coercion and low information. The people knew nothing about public affairs through a state monopoly of the media and publication. Party Congresses which were supposed to meet at least once every three years became less and less frequent. There was a gap of 13 years between the 18th Congress which met in 1939 and 19th Congress which met in 1952.

Khrushchev who took over Party leadership after the death of Stalin in 1953, took bold steps to undo the great harm caused by the cult of personality. The decisions of the Twentieth Party Congress which emphasised the principle of collective leadership, the new Party Programme adopted in 1961 along with the new Party Rules created a freer atmosphere necessary for formation of public opinion and enhancing its influence on important policy matters. The Party Congresses began to be convened more frequently and they were used as a forum for generating an adversarial relationship between the leadership and the masses. The Soviets which provided the best platform for expressing the public opinion and which were reduced to the function of rubber-stamping the decisions of the Party leadership

during the period of Stalin, were re-emergised. Their authority was strengthened and their meetings were held more frequently providing opportunity for public criticism of individual ministers and government policies. Such laws as the Pension Law in 1956, Industrial Re-Organisation Draft in 1957, etc. were adopted after considerable discussion in Supreme Soviet. In 1959 the right to recall deputies was legalised by Supreme Soviet. A number of deputies were recalled not only from the local Soviets but from the Supreme Soviet as well. Khrushchev enunciation of the new concept of the "state of the whole people" was important step in the direction of extending Soviet democracy and elevating the role of public opinion. Khrushchev also introduced a new institution - the public opinion polls. Several such polls were conducted in 1960s. These polls helped the leadership in gathering information needed to achieve greater efficiency and to combat apathy and instil a higher sense of participation among various strata of the population.

A new stage in the development of public opinion was inaugurated by 1977 Constitution under Brezhnev. The new Constitution not only gave official recognition to the role

of public opinion but also extended its scope by adding several new Articles, as for example, Article 5 provides that major matters of state shall be submitted for nationwide discussion and put to a popular vote (referendum). In Article 9 constant responsiveness to public opinion is regarded as a principal direction in the extension of socialist democracy. Article 49 makes it obligatory for concerned authorities to answer citizens' letters within the specified time. Article 57 provides the Soviet citizens the right to legal protection, i.e., protection by the courts against any encroachments upon life and health, property, personal freedom, honour and dignity. Article 58 makes provision for the right to appeal in a court of law against unlawful actions by officials of the government and also to indemnification for damages incurred by such unlawful actions. Thus Article 57 of the 1977 Constitution symbolises the rule of law spirit in the Soviet political system.

Public discussion of drafts, laws and economic plans became a wide spirit feature of the Brezhnev period. The adoption of the 1977 Constitution after nationwide discussion of its draft provides the best example of new stress on public opinion. 80 per cent of the adult population of the

USSR, about 14,000,000 citizens participated in this discussion in 1,500,000 meetings. Public discussions were also held on such laws as Fundamentals of Legislation on Marriage and the Family, Public Health, Labour, Land etc.,.

A study of the functioning of Soviets and Party organisations at different level reveals the new importance attached to public opinion, by the State and the Party. Through the institution of voluntary organisations called aktiv of people at local level participation of millions of people in standing commissions and committees of local Soviets is ensured. The right to recall exist just not in theory. Its use runs to 600-700 cases per year. In all a total of 8000 deputies were recalled during the 1959-81 period in the local Soviets. More than 100 deputies from Supreme Soviet, Union and autonomus republics and 12 deputies to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR were recalled during the same period. Soviets at all levels are also actively working with the peoples' letters criticizing shortcomings and sending proposals.

A more recent development is the establishment of special bodies for studying public opinion which study

the changing mood of the public on important policy matters - by conducting polls and surveys.

The 1961 Party Programme stated that the Party considers it its duty always to consult the working people on major questions of home and foreign policy, to make these questions an object of nationwide discussion and to attract more non-members to participating in all its works. The Soviet people are widely informed about the work of party through the media and meetings. Besides public discussions the Party encourages people to lodge complaints and written suggestions for its activities and policies. Letters from the people to Party organs strengthen and broaden the link between the Party and the people provide a means for expression of public opinion and sources of information about the peoples' interests and requirements to the Party. Since the 60s public opinion Research Groups have been formed by a number of all level Party organisations to conduct surveys and polls. The Party's work on consideration of letters has also been improved. In 1978 alone Central Committee of the Party organisations received 700,000 letters while around 2,00,000 letters were received by the Central Committee of the Union Republics and by territorial regional

and other Party Committees. In 1978 a Letters' Department was formed at the Central Committee Secretariat to analyse the mail systematically and completely. A Council on the Study of Public Opinion was established at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Georgia in 1975. It conducted by 1980 100 sociological polls. Moscow and Leningrad Party Organisations have also established such Councils. A Conference on public opinion was held in Tbilise 1984.

However, despite a definite advance in the field of consulting public opinion, the present day Soviet political system has suffered from certain inbuilt systemic constraints. An irrational extension of the leading and vanguard role of the Party, lack of clear-cut demarcation of the functions of Party organisations and state and economic bodies, overcentralisation in the name of democratic centralism have resulted in largely limiting these changes to outward form only. These changes are yet to acquire an institutional basis independent of control by Party bureaucracy.

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